

A PROFILE OF IMMIGRANTS IN HOUSTON, THE NATION'S MOST DIVERSE METROPOLITAN AREA



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Executive Summary

Houston is the most diverse, rapidly growing major U.S. metropolitan area, and immigration has contributed greatly to its growth and diversity. Over the past 20 years the Latino and Asian shares of the area's population have nearly doubled; as of the 2010 Census, no one racial or ethnic group formed a significant majority of Houston's population.

In 2013 the Houston metropolitan area was home to 6.3 million people, of whom 1.4 million were foreign born—an increase of almost 60 percent from 2000.¹ Among U.S. metropolitan areas, Houston's immigrant population was the fifth largest; the area ranked third in the numbers of Mexican, Vietnamese, and Honduran immigrants. Forty-four percent (620,000) of Houston's immigrants were Mexican, and another 13 percent (191,000) were from the Northern Triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras).

From 2000 through 2013, Houston's immigrant population grew at nearly twice the national rate: 59 percent versus 33 percent. The number of immigrants from Guatemala and Honduras more than doubled over the period. Of note, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are the three largest source countries for the recent surge of unaccompanied immigrant children crossing the border with Mexico near McAllen in South Texas. The area's two largest and most established foreign-born populations—Mexican and Vietnamese—have grown more slowly over the years.

Immigrants in Houston are less likely to be U.S. citizens than are immigrants nationally (34 percent versus 44 percent); those from Mexico and Central America are least likely to be citizens. There are two reasons for the Houston area's low citizenship rate. First, the area has a relatively high share of unauthorized immigrants from Mexico and Central America in general (one-third of all Houston-area immigrants), and a high share of migrants with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), from El Salvador and Honduras in particular; neither group is eligible for citizenship. Second, the share of eligible legal permanent residents (LPRs) who have naturalized is relatively small in Houston, and here again Mexican and Central Americans (with the exception of Salvadorans) are the least likely to naturalize.

From 2000 through 2013, Houston's immigrant population grew at nearly twice the national rate: 59 percent versus 33 percent.

Relatively low incomes, low levels of formal education, and limited English proficiency may present barriers to citizenship and receipt of other needed benefits and services in the Latino immigrant community. The median household income of Mexican and Central American immigrants is about half that of the U.S.-born population in Houston, and their poverty rate is almost twice as high. Most immigrants from these backgrounds lack a high school education and do not speak English well. Thus, Mexican and Central American immigrants may experience difficulties affording application fees, passing the naturalization test in English, and understanding the process of applying for citizenship and other immigration benefits.

A central purpose of this report is to provide information for the Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative and other immigration service providers as they engage in their naturalization and immigration benefit assistance activities. The authors tabulated demand for immigration assistance in Houston using data from the American Community Survey (ACS), with the legal status of immigrants assigned through a new method based on self-reported green card (legal permanent residence) status

¹ The greater Houston metropolitan area, as described in this report, includes Harris County and ten surrounding counties: Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Waller, Liberty, Chambers, Matagorda, Wharton, and Austin. The report's use of Houston means the greater Houston region.



in the U.S. Census Bureau' Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). Based on their analysis, the authors tabulated the following numbers of immigrants potentially in need of community-based immigration assistance:

- An estimated 350,000 LPRs, most of them from Mexico and Central America, are eligible for naturalization but have not yet applied.
- Approximately 60,000 unauthorized youth may need outreach, application assistance, and legal support to help them apply or qualify for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This number includes approximately 30,000 DACA beneficiaries who may need renewal assistance, as well as 30,000 who are eligible and have not yet applied.
- An additional 140,000 unauthorized immigrant parents may need assistance to apply for the new Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program, once the federal government begins taking applications for that program, currently expected in mid-May 2015.
- Nearly half of the metro area's 400,000 unauthorized immigrants, or about 200,000 individuals, are eligible for one or the other of these deferred action programs.
- About 4,400 unaccompanied children who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally, and were taken into federal custody, were reunified with family members living in Harris County from September 2013 through December 2014.

While this report focuses primarily on disadvantaged groups of Latino immigrants, both legal and unauthorized, it should be noted that other groups of immigrants in Houston have relatively high education levels, incomes, and citizenship rates, and their economic contributions exceed those of U.S.-born Houstonians. For instance, Filipino and Indian immigrants have substantially higher levels of education and incomes than the average Houstonian, and as a result make substantial economic and fiscal contributions to the region. There is also great diversity within the major immigrant origin groups on the indicators discussed in the report, which only presents averages for all immigrants in a given group.

Immigration has contributed greatly to the Houston area's growth and diversity.

I. Introduction

Houston is the most diverse, rapidly growing of the major U.S. metropolitan areas. Between 2000 and 2010 Houston's population expanded by 1.2 million people—more than any other metropolitan area. By the time of the 2010 Census, Houston's population did not have a majority racial or ethnic group: non-Hispanic whites represented 40 percent of the total population, Latinos 36 percent, Blacks 17 percent, and Asians 6 percent. The substantial representation of three major racial and ethnic groups alongside a significant Asian population made Houston the most diverse of the ten largest U.S. metropolitan areas—surpassing even New York City.²

Immigration has contributed greatly to the Houston area's growth and diversity. Over the past 20

² Michael Emerson, Jenifer Bratter, and Junia Howell, *Houston Region Grows More Racially/Ethnically Diverse, with Small Declines in Segregation* (Houston, Texas: Kinder Institute for Urban Research and the Hobby Center for the Study of Texas, 2012), http://kinder.rice.edu/uploadedFiles/Urban_Research_Center/Media/Houston%20Region%20Grows%20More%20Ethnically%20Diverse%202-13.pdf.



years the Latino and Asian shares of the area's population have nearly doubled, while the Black share has remained steady and the non-Hispanic white share has fallen. New immigrants from diverse origins, primarily Latin America and Asia, are fueling this rapid change.

Houston also has one of the strongest labor markets in the United States: its unemployment rate—4.5 percent in November 2014—is a full percentage point below the national average.³ Houston's growing economy provides a solid foundation for the integration of immigrants and their children.

At the same time, Houston has a relatively low-wage economy. The area's immigrant and U.S.-born populations have relatively high poverty rates compared with those in other major urban areas. The low incomes of Houston's immigrants—particularly Latinos—may present barriers to their integration and access to legal assistance, health care, and other needed services.

This report, commissioned by the Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative,⁴ provides an overview of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Houston's immigrants, along with their naturalization rates, legal status, and potential eligibility for immigration benefits such as citizenship or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). This report was produced with an eye toward presenting data that would be useful for providers of legal, education, social, and other services to immigrant communities.

II. Data and Methods

Unless otherwise noted, the findings in this report are based on Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of the American Community Survey (ACS), using five years of pooled data (2008-12)—the latest data available at the time this report was written. Comparisons are drawn with the 1990 and 2000 U.S. censuses, and updates to 2013 are provided where feasible, using the 2013 ACS.⁵ The legal status of immigrants in the ACS was assigned using a new method based on responses to the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which like the ACS is administered by the U.S. Census Bureau. This innovative method, developed by Dr. Jennifer Van Hook at The Pennsylvania State University and Dr. James Bachmeier at Temple University with input from MPI, uses self-reported “green card” status in the SIPP to determine whether respondents are legal permanent residents (LPRs), and then, in the ACS, assigns LPR status to noncitizens with characteristics similar to the LPRs in the SIPP. The remaining immigrants are classified as unauthorized or as having temporary status (for example, students, H-1B workers, or Central Americans with TPS [Temporary Protected Status]) based on other characteristics.⁶ (Please see the Appendix for definitions of the legal statuses disaggregated in the analysis.)

For the purposes of this report and except where noted, the greater Houston metropolitan area consists of Harris County and ten surrounding counties: Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Waller, Liberty,

3 The national unemployment rate fell to 5.6 percent in November 2014. See U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), “Unemployment Rates for Metropolitan Areas: Monthly Rankings, Not Seasonally Adjusted, November 2014,” *Local Area Unemployment Statistics*, www.bls.gov/web/metro/laummtrk.htm.

4 The Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative is a local collaborative of 33 nonprofit organizations, two law schools, the City of Houston, and four area foundations. Established in February 2013, the Collaborative has worked on developing a coordinated network of services to assist low-income immigrants in accessing information and legal representation to make choices in their own best interest.

5 The American Community Survey (ACS) data were accessed from Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0* [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010).

6 This method is documented in Jennifer Van Hook, James D. Bachmeier, Donna L. Coffman, and Ofer Harel, “Can We Spin Straw Into Gold? An Evaluation of Immigrant Legal Status Imputation Approaches,” *Demography* (2014), <http://link.springer.com/journal/13524>; Jeanne Batalova, Sarah Hooker, and Randy Capps, *DACA at the Two-Year Mark: A National and State Profile of Youth Eligible and Applying for Deferred Action* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/daca-two-year-mark-national-and-state-profile-youth-eligible-and-applying-deferred-action.



Chambers, Matagorda, Wharton, and Austin.⁷

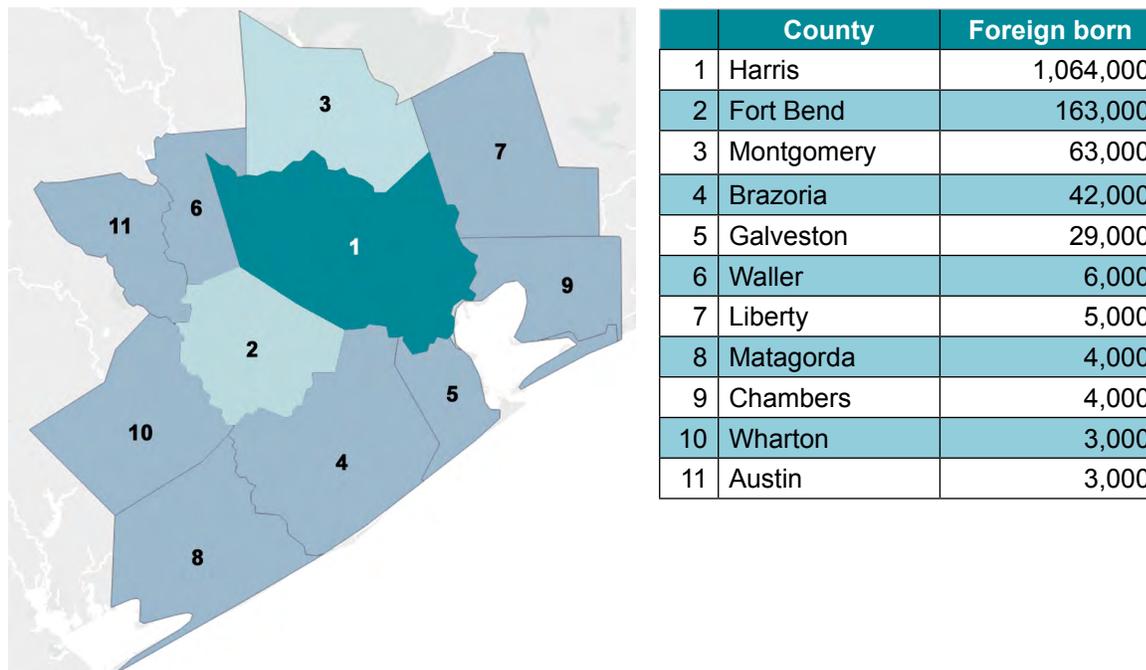
III. Findings

In 2013 the Houston metropolitan area had a total population of 6.3 million, of whom nearly 23 percent or 1.4 million were foreign born. The area’s immigrant population had increased almost 59 percent from 2000, when it was close to 900,000. Houston’s foreign-born population ranked fifth among U.S. metropolitan areas, after New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago.

A. Immigrant Population Concentrations

Houston is a large metropolitan area, encompassing almost 9,000 square miles—a land area larger than any of the four smallest states (New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island). The population, including immigrants, is highly concentrated in Harris County, where 1.1 million of the area’s 1.4 million immigrants lived in 2013 (see Figure 1). Another 163,000 immigrants lived in Fort Bend County and significant numbers in Montgomery, Brazoria, and Galveston counties. Very small numbers lived in the remaining counties.

Figure 1. Foreign-Born Populations in the Houston Metropolitan Area, by County, 2013



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “American Fact Finder,” <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.

⁷ Matagorda, Wharton, and Austin counties are not part of the official Houston-Galveston-Brazoria Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (Houston CMSA), but were included in the analysis because they shared Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) boundaries with Houston CMSA counties in the ACS data employed.



B. Immigrant Origins

Mexico and Central America are the main origins of Houston’s immigrants. Houston, like other Texas cities, has a very large Mexican-origin population. In 2008-12 about 600,000 Mexican-born people were living in Houston, representing 45 percent of the area’s immigrants (see Table 1). Among U.S. metropolitan areas, Houston’s Mexican-born population ranked third in size, after Los Angeles and Chicago. The area’s Mexican-origin community dates to the war between Texas and Mexico in the 1830s. Large numbers of Mexicans migrated to the area starting in 1910, after the Mexican Revolution.⁸

Unlike some other Texas cities, Houston also has significant numbers of immigrants from a wide range of countries around the world. Immigrants from the Northern Triangle of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—formed the second-largest group after those from Mexican origins, accounting for 180,000 people in 2008-12. Houston’s Honduran immigrant population ranked third among U.S. metropolitan areas, the Salvadoran population fourth, and the Guatemalan fifth. Central American immigrants represent a relatively recent flow, one that started in earnest during the civil wars in the Northern Triangle in the 1980s, and accelerated during 2013-14 as migrants from the region fled ongoing violence and endemic poverty.⁹

Table 1. Top 15 Countries of Origin for Houston Area’s Foreign-Born Population, and Rank among U.S. Metropolitan Areas, 2008-12

Country	Foreign-Born Population	Metropolitan Area Rank
All countries	1,319,000	5
Mexico	599,000	3
El Salvador	104,000	4
Vietnam	74,000	3
India	60,000	9
Honduras	45,000	3
Philippines	34,000	13
China	33,000	10
Guatemala	31,000	5
Pakistan	26,000	2
Colombia	21,000	4
Nigeria	20,000	2
Canada	14,000	12
Korea	11,000	16
Taiwan	11,000	6
Venezuela	11,000	4

Note: The foreign-born population of the Houston metro area was 1.3 million in 2008-12, and 1.4 million in 2013.
Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) data, 2008-12 pooled.

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are also the three largest source countries for the recent wave of unaccompanied immigrant children crossing the border with Mexico near McAllen in South Texas. More children have been reunified with family members in Houston than in any other city, due in large part to its proximity to the South Texas border region and substantial Central American immigrant communities.¹⁰ As this report was written in January 2015, several thousand unaccompanied child

8 Janet Saltzman Chafetz and Helen Rose Ebaugh, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000).

9 Ibid.

10 From September 2013 through December 2014, the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement reunified 4,400 unaccompanied migrant children with family members living in Harris County; Los Angeles ranked second in the United States, with 3,300 such



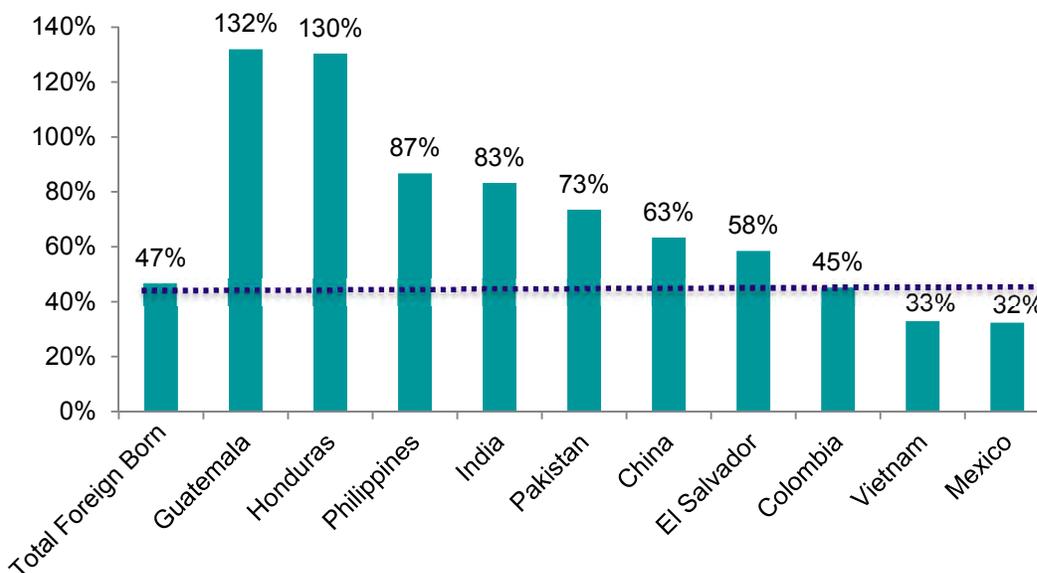
migrants living in Houston awaited hearings, after which immigration judges would decide who would be deported or allowed to stay in the United States.

Southeast Asia represents another important origin of Houston’s immigrants, dating back to 1975, the end of the Vietnam War, and the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act.¹¹ In 2008-12 about 75,000 Vietnamese immigrants were living in Houston, many of whom came to the area as refugees. Houston is also home to significant numbers of immigrants from other Asian countries, including India, the Philippines, China, and Pakistan.

C. Immigrant Population Growth

From 2000 through 2013, Houston’s immigrant population grew at nearly twice the national rate: 59 percent versus 33 percent. Between 2000 and 2012 the populations from Guatemala and Honduras grew the fastest, by more than double (see Figure 2). The numbers of foreign born from the Philippines, India, Pakistan, China, and El Salvador also exceeded the overall increase in Houston’s foreign-born population.

Figure 2. Immigrant Population Growth Rate in Houston Area by National Origin, 2000-12



Source: MPI analysis of 2008-12 ACS data.

By comparison, the Mexican and Vietnamese immigrant populations grew gradually. These communities are among the three oldest, largest, and most established populations in Houston (Salvadorans represent the third). Of note, the recent large wave of Mexican migration nationally has all but ceased; demographers estimate no net growth in the Mexican population nationwide since 2007.¹² Houston, however, has experienced growth in its Mexican population since that time.

reunifications. See U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), “Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by County,” accessed January 29, 2014, www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/unaccompanied-children-released-to-sponsors-by-county.

11 Chafetz and Ebaugh, *Religion and the New Immigrants*.

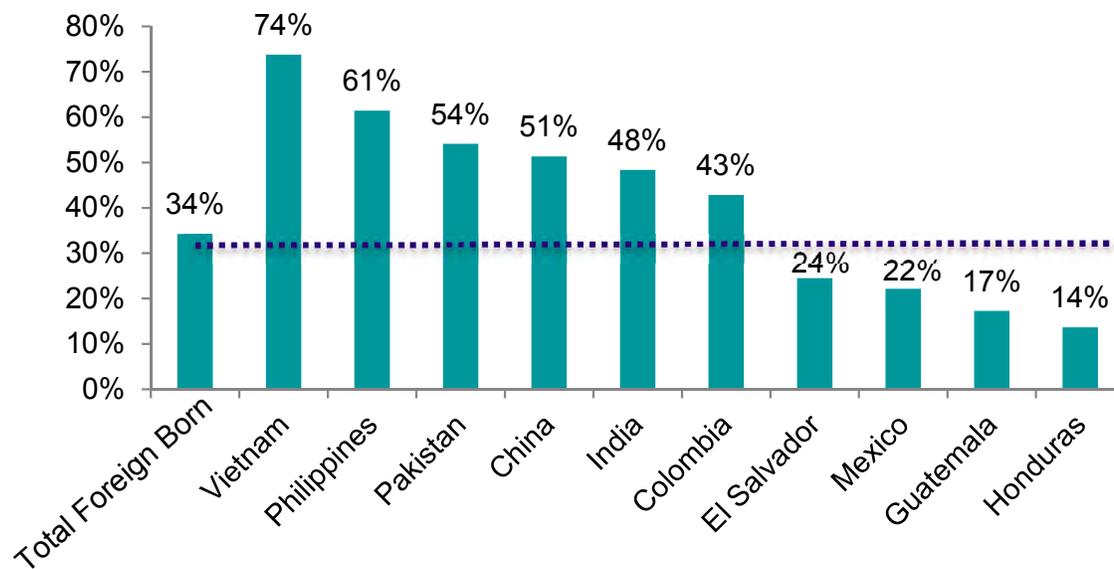
12 Jeffrey S. Passel, D’Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, *Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends Project, 2014), www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/23/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less/.



D. Naturalization Rates

The Houston metro area is home to a large number of legal permanent residents—many of them Latinos—who may need legal assistance to naturalize. In the 2008-12 period Houston’s immigrants were less likely to be U.S. citizens than immigrants nationally: 34 percent versus 44 percent. The shares of naturalized U.S. citizens from the largest Latin American source countries were even lower: Mexico (22 percent of all immigrants), El Salvador (24 percent), Guatemala (17 percent), and Honduras (14 percent). By contrast, a majority of immigrants from most major Asian sending countries were citizens (Figure 3). Vietnamese immigrants had the highest citizenship rate, at 74 percent, due in large part to the expedited and direct path to permanent residency and citizenship offered to refugees.

Figure 3. Naturalization Rate as Share of Overall Immigrant Population in Houston Area, by National Origin, 2008-12



Source: MPI analysis of 2008-12 ACS data.

The low citizenship rate of Houston’s immigrants—and of Latinos in particular—reduces their political power and civic participation. There are now almost as many Latinos as non-Hispanic whites in Houston, but their political and economic integration suffers without the rights of citizenship.

The low shares of citizens among Mexican and Central American immigrants have two main explanations. First, many are unauthorized immigrants or temporary residents who are not eligible to become U.S. citizens. In 2008-12 almost half of Mexican immigrants in Houston and more than half of those from Guatemala and Honduras were unauthorized—meaning they had entered the United States illegally (most across the U.S.-Mexico border), overstayed a valid visa, or otherwise broken the terms of their admission to the United States (see Figure 4). Substantial numbers of Colombian and Salvadoran immigrants were also unauthorized. These data include the Guatemalan, Honduran, and Salvadoran children who had entered the United States illegally without their parents—but do not account for a recent surge in their number, which almost doubled between 2013 and 2014.¹³ Houston, because of its proximity to the U.S.-

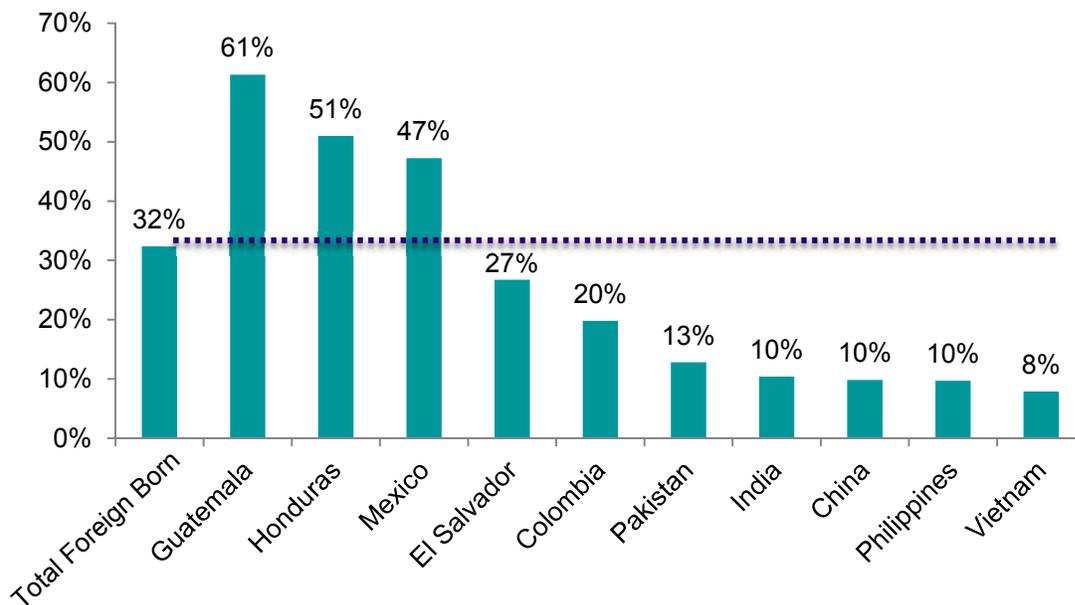
¹³ During fiscal year (FY) 2014, the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended 69,000 unaccompanied migrant children along the U.S.-Mexico border; this was up from 39,000 in FY 2013. See U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), “Stats and Summaries: Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children,” accessed October 1, 2014, www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children.



Mexico border and its large Mexican and Central America populations, has a higher share of unauthorized immigrants (32 percent) than the United States as a whole (28 percent).

Houston also has a substantial population of temporary migrants with legal status. This population includes several thousand immigrants from El Salvador and Honduras with Temporary Protected Status (TPS)—a status authorized by Congress and granted to nationals of designated countries that have suffered natural disasters or armed conflict.¹⁴ TPS is by definition temporary, and while individuals with TPS can work legally in the United States, they are not eligible for most public benefits and cannot apply for citizenship. Houston also has a substantial number of foreign-born individuals on student visas and temporary employment visas—such as H-1B for high-skilled workers in specialty occupations and L for those in management positions. Most of these visas, nationally and in Houston, go to immigrants from India, China, and the Philippines.

Figure 4. Unauthorized Immigrants in Houston Area as Share of the Foreign Born, by National Origin, 2008-12



Source: MPI analysis of data from the 2008-12 ACS, pooled, and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), by James Bachmeier of Temple University and Jennifer Van Hook of Pennsylvania State University, Population Research Institute.

Another reason for the small share of citizens among Mexican and Central American immigrants is their low propensity to naturalize even when eligible. For instance, in 2008-12, just 40 percent of Mexicans and 39 percent of Guatemalans who were eligible to naturalize had done so (see Figure 5). In a notable exception to the pattern for Central American immigrants, the Salvadoran population has a high naturalization rate (81 percent) among eligible LPRs. But it should be noted that TPS is more common than LPR status among Salvadorans—and TPS does not provide a basis for citizenship eligibility. Asian immigrants are generally more likely than those from Latin America to naturalize: two-thirds or more of area immigrants from the major source countries in Asia in 2008-12 had naturalized if eligible to do so. To

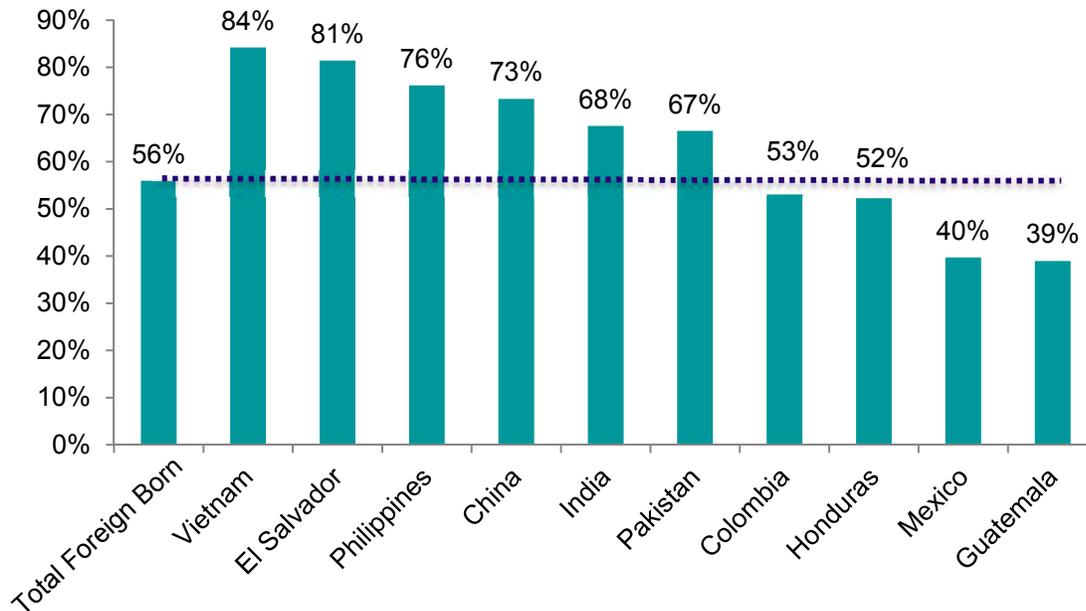
14 The large number of Salvadorans with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) lowers the number of unauthorized; there are far more Salvadorans than Hondurans nationwide with TPS: 212,000 versus 64,000. See Madeline Messick and Claire Bergeron, “Temporary Protected Status in the United States: A Grant of Humanitarian Relief that Is Less than Permanent,” *Migration Information Source*, July 2014, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/temporary-protected-status-united-states-grant-humanitarian-relief-less-permanent.



be eligible to naturalize, immigrants generally must have resided in the United States for at least five years with LPR status—otherwise known as having a green card—and meet other criteria (see Figure 5).

An estimated 350,000 immigrants in Houston were eligible to naturalize in 2008-12 but had not yet done so. Members of this group represent an important target for citizenship outreach, English language preparation, application assistance, and legal services.

Figure 5. Naturalized Citizens in Houston Area as Share of Eligible Legal Permanent Residents, by National Origin, 2008-12



Note: To be eligible for U.S. citizenship, immigrants must have held LPR status for at least five years—three years if married to a U.S. citizen—and pass a naturalization test, unless they are children receiving citizenship as a derivative of another family member or otherwise qualify for an exemption from the test.

Source: MPI analysis of 2008-12 ACS and 2008 SIPP data by Bachmeier and Van Hook.

E. Deferred Action Programs and Eligibility

In August 2012 the Obama administration initiated the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program to provide young unauthorized immigrants who arrived as children with the opportunity to stay and work legally in the United States; in November 2014, the administration expanded eligibility for the program. Since DACA was not legislated by Congress, it does not confer legal status or a path to citizenship. But DACA, like TPS, confers a work permit and protection from deportation. DACA is limited to three-year periods and can be renewed. Since August 2014, when the first DACA beneficiaries became eligible for renewal, a small number have renewed their status. To qualify for the program under the expanded categories announced in November 2014, individuals must:

- be unauthorized;
- be age 15 or older;
- have entered the United States before age 16;
- have resided in the United States continuously since January 2010;
- be in school, have a high school or equivalent degree, or be enrolled in a qualifying adult education program; and



- pass a security and criminal background check.¹⁵

MPI estimates that 1.5 million people nationwide are immediately eligible for DACA,¹⁶ amounting to about 15 percent of the total U.S. estimated unauthorized population of 11.4 million in 2012.¹⁷ An estimated 15 percent of Houston's unauthorized population (60,000 out of 407,000 in 2012) is eligible for DACA, according to the MPI estimates (see Table 2).¹⁸

According to the most recent data from December 2014, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has accepted 727,164 initial DACA applications and approved 638,897 of them. About 235,000 renewals had been filed with the agency and about 148,000 had been approved.¹⁹ USCIS has accepted 162,000 total applications from Texas, of which nearly 131,000 have been approved. While these data do not specify the number of applications by metropolitan area, previous data show that USCIS accepted 31,000 applications from the Houston metropolitan area between August 2012 and September 2013; 26,000 had been approved.²⁰

In November 2014, alongside the expansions to DACA, the Obama administration announced a new program: Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA). To qualify for this program, which was scheduled to begin accepting applications in mid-May 2015,²¹ individuals must:

- be unauthorized;
- have a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident child of any age;
- have resided in the United States continuously since January 2010; and
- pass a security and criminal background check.²²

MPI estimates that 32 percent of the overall unauthorized population (3.7 million of the 11.4 million in the United States) is eligible for DAPA.²³ Similarly, about one-third of Houston's unauthorized population is eligible for the program: 137,000 out of 407,000.²⁴ Altogether, close to half of Houston's unauthorized

15 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), "Executive Actions on Immigration," updated January 30, 2015, www.uscis.gov/immigrationaction.

16 Migration Policy Institute (MPI), "As Many as 3.7 Million Unauthorized Immigrants Could Get Relief from Deportation under Anticipated New Deferred Action Program," (news release, November 19, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/news/mpi-many-37-million-unauthorized-immigrants-could-get-relief-deportation-under-anticipated-new.

17 Bryan Baker and Nancy Rytina, *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2012* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013), www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois_ill_pe_2012_2.pdf.

18 This estimate does not include individuals who fit all the eligibility criteria for DACA except for a high school degree or current school enrollment; MPI estimates this group to be about 30,000 in the Houston area. In addition nearly 30,000 unauthorized immigrants in Houston fit all eligibility requirements except for age, as they are currently under age 15; this group will age into eligibility in the coming years. MPI, "As Many as 3.7 Million Unauthorized Immigrants Could Get Relief from Deportation under Anticipated New Deferred Action Program."

19 USCIS, "Number of I-821D, Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals by Fiscal Year, Quarter, Intake, Biometrics and Case Status: 2012-2015 (December 31)," February 12, 2015, www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/I821d_performancedata_fy2015_qtr1.pdf.

20 USCIS, "Characteristics of Individuals Requesting and Approved for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)," published July 10, 2014, www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Humanitarian/Deferred%20Action%20for%20Childhood%20Arrivals/USCIS-DACA-Characteristics-Data-2014-7-10.pdf.

21 On February 16, 2015, a U.S. district court judge in Brownsville, Texas, issued an injunction temporarily blocking implementation of the DACA expansions and the launch of the Deferred Action for Parents of U.S. Citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program. At this writing, the Obama administration had put on hold the DACA expansion and planned DAPA program, pending appeal of the temporary injunction.

22 USCIS, "Executive Actions on Immigration."

23 MPI, "As Many as 3.7 Million Unauthorized Immigrants Could Get Relief from Deportation under Anticipated New Deferred Action Program."

24 USCIS, "Executive Actions on Immigration." Those unauthorized immigrants who are eligible for both programs are counted in the DACA category and excluded from the DAPA category.



population is eligible for either DACA or DAPA (196,000 out of 407,000).

When this report was completed in February 2015, USCIS had not started taking applications under the expanded DACA program. Out of the 49,000 immediately eligible for DACA under the 2012 program rules, 31,000 had applied as of September 2013—an application rate of 63 percent among eligible youth.²⁵ This application rate exceeds MPI estimates for Texas (58 percent) and the nation (47 percent) over the same period.²⁶

Table 2. Number of Unauthorized Immigrants in the Houston Area, by DACA and DAPA Eligibility, 2008-12

	Eligible for Deferred Action Programs	Percent of Total
Total unauthorized population in Houston area	407,000	100%
Eligible for DACA	60,000	15%
Eligible for DAPA	137,000	33%
Eligible for DACA or DAPA	196,000	48%
Not eligible for either program	201,000	52%

Notes: These estimates include only Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Chambers, and Liberty counties. Estimates are unavailable for the smaller counties in the Houston area. Individuals eligible for both programs are counted in the DACA category and excluded in the DAPA category. Individuals who are eligible for the DACA program—except for the fact that they lack a high school education—and those who are below the minimum age of 15 are not included in the DACA estimate. *Source:* MPI analysis of 2008-12 ACS and 2008 SIPP data by Bachmeier and Van Hook.

MPI's estimates suggest that application rates among DACA-eligible youth tend to be higher in southwestern states such as Texas than elsewhere in the nation.²⁷ Most likely, this is because these states have high shares of Mexican and Central American immigrants (who tend to apply for DACA at higher rates than other immigrant groups), and proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border may make it more urgent for eligible youth to come forward for protection from deportation. While Mexican and Central American immigrants comprise a large majority of the DACA-eligible population in Houston, there are also small numbers from Asian countries such as Korea and the Philippines.

An estimated 30,000 DACA-eligible youth in Houston have not yet applied for the program (counting those newly eligible under the 2014 expansion), and up to 30,000 will be eligible for DACA renewal in the coming months. These two groups are likely to generate ongoing demand for outreach, application assistance, and legal services.

F. Income Levels

The incomes of Houston area immigrants vary widely by origin, a fact that carries implications for immigration service demand—particularly among lower-income Latinos. In 2008-12 the foreign-born

25 USCIS has only released data on DACA applications at the metropolitan level through September 2013. See USCIS, "Characteristics of Individuals Requesting and Approved for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)," accessed October 1, 2014, www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Humanitarian/Deferred%20Action%20for%20Childhood%20Arrivals/USCIS-DACA-Characteristics-Data-2014-7-10.pdf.

26 The authors calculated this application rate as follows: (a) number of applications accepted for processing (USCIS administrative data); (b) estimated number of individuals eligible for DACA under the 2012 rules (MPI analysis of Survey of Income and Program Participation [SIPP] and ACS data).

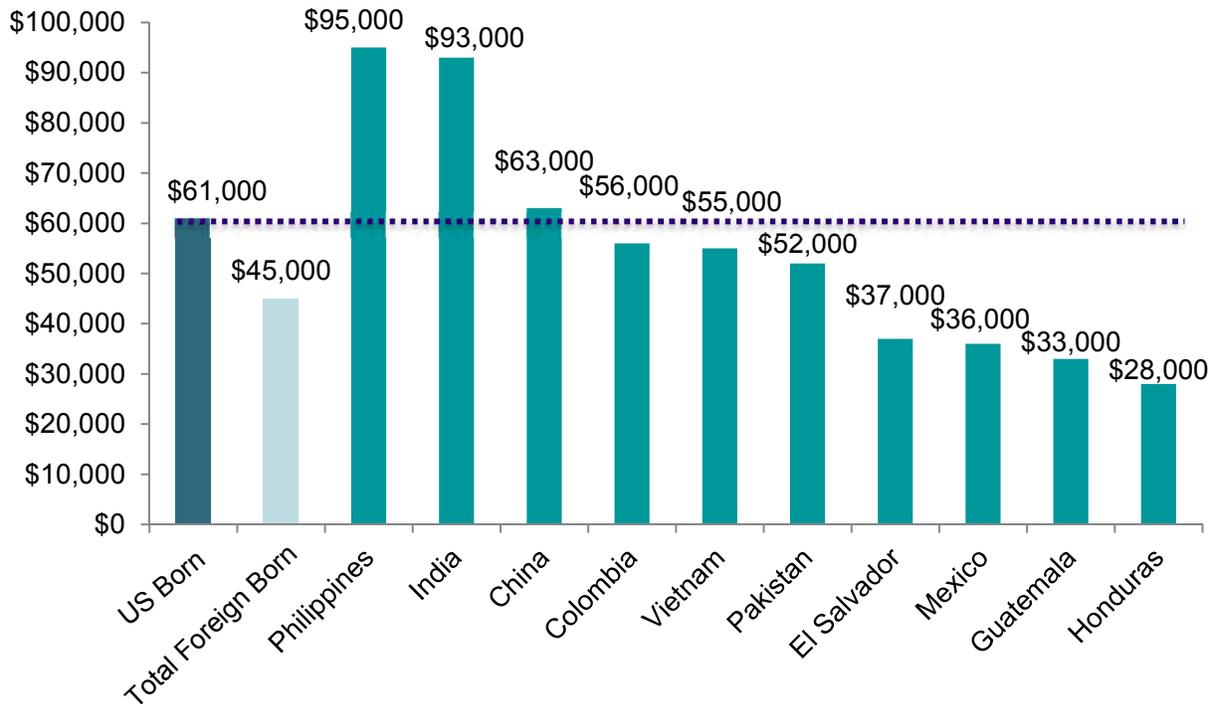
27 Batalova, Hooker, and Capps, *DACA at the Two-Year Mark*.



median annual household income was \$45,000, versus \$61,000 for U.S-born households in Houston.²⁸ The income gap between immigrants and the U.S. born was greater in Houston than nationally.²⁹

By contrast, the median incomes of Filipinos and Indians, exceeding \$90,000, far above that the U.S. born (see Figure 6). These are the two immigrant groups with the highest levels of formal education and English proficiency—nationally and in the Houston area.

Figure 6. Median Household Income of Houston Area Residents, by National Origin, 2008-12



Note: Incomes for individuals surveyed in 2008 through 2011 are adjusted for inflation to match incomes of those surveyed in 2012.

Source: MPI analysis of 2008-12 ACS data.

Several national-origin groups had incomes near the median of the U.S.-born population; incomes were far lower in Mexican and Central American communities. Specifically, Mexican and Central American immigrants were more likely than others to have incomes below the federal poverty level (FPL). In 2008-12 one-third of immigrants from Honduras and more than one-quarter of those from Guatemala and Mexico lived in families with incomes below 100 percent of the FPL (see Figure 7). Another 35 to 40 percent of immigrants from these three origins lived in families with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the FPL.

Among the unauthorized population living in Houston, 34 percent had incomes below the FPL and 70 percent had incomes below twice the poverty level.³⁰ A similar share of all immigrants from Mexico and Central America lived in families with incomes below twice the poverty level, and near the eligibility

28 Households are defined as “foreign-born” or “U.S.-born” based on the nativity of the household head.

29 In the 2008-12 period median annual household income nationally was \$48,000 for the foreign born and \$53,000 for the U.S. born nationwide.

30 Estimates of unauthorized immigrants with poverty-level incomes were generated for five Houston area counties: Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Chambers, and Liberty; other counties had populations too small to estimate. See MPI Data Hub, “Unauthorized Immigrant Population Profiles,” accessed February 8, 2015, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/us-immigration-policy-program-data-hub/unauthorized-immigrant-population-profiles.

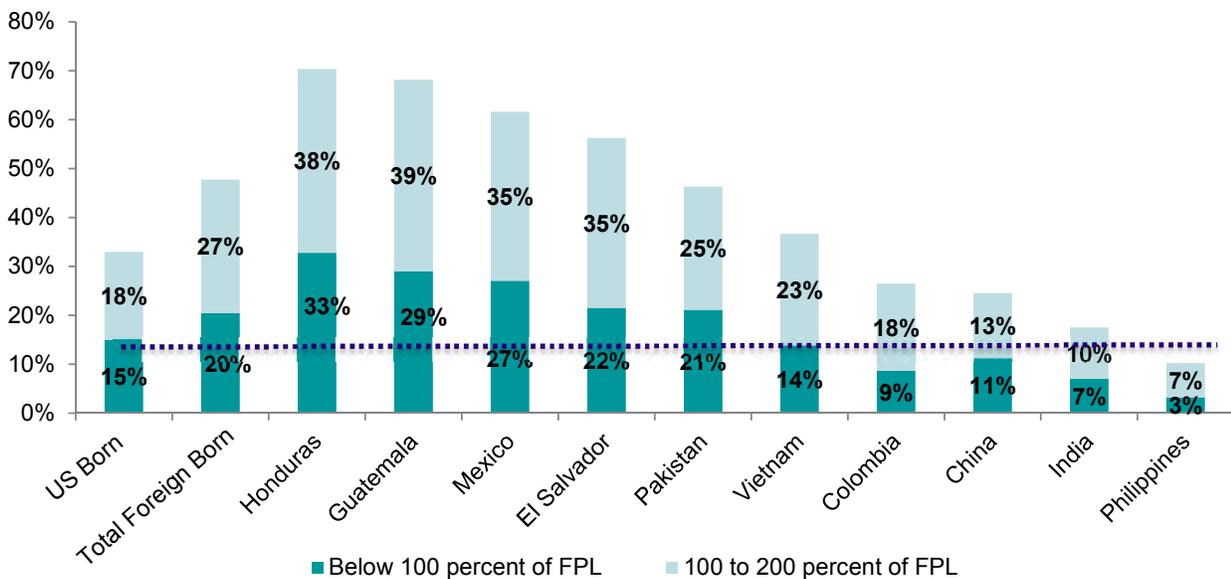


thresholds for important public benefit programs such nutritional assistance to women, infants, and children; and free and reduced-price school lunches.³¹ Unauthorized immigrants are not eligible for other public benefit programs, such Medicaid, food stamps, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

At the same time, the low incomes of Mexican and Central American immigrants—who form the majority of those eligible for naturalization and DACA or DAPA—may impede their access to these immigration benefit programs. Application fees for DACA are \$465 and for naturalization \$680, while associated legal fees can add up to several times these amounts.³²

Immigrants from Asian origins have much lower poverty rates. For instance, immigrants from China, India, and the Philippines are substantially less likely to be poor than U.S.-born residents of the Houston area. Thus, these groups are more likely to be able to pay for immigration services themselves.

Figure 7. Poverty Levels for Individuals in Houston Area, by National Origin, 2008-12



Note: FPL = federal poverty level.

Source: MPI analysis of 2008-12 ACS data.

G. Educational Attainment

Low educational attainment is strongly correlated with low income in Houston's Latino immigrant communities. More than 60 percent of Mexican and Central American immigrants in Houston had not completed high school or an equivalent level of education (see Figure 8). About one-third had completed high school but not a four-year college (bachelor's) degree. Fewer than 10 percent had a college or professional degree. Among the unauthorized population—most of whom are from Mexico and Central America—59 percent lacked a high school education.³³

31 The income-eligibility threshold for these three programs is 185 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL).

32 The DACA application fee of \$465 consists of a \$380 filing fee plus \$85 fee for biometric services. See USCIS, "Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)," accessed October 24, 2014, www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca. The \$680 naturalization fee includes a \$595 filing fee and \$85 for biometrics. See USCIS, "M-477 Document Checklist," accessed October 24, 2014, www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/article/attachments.pdf.

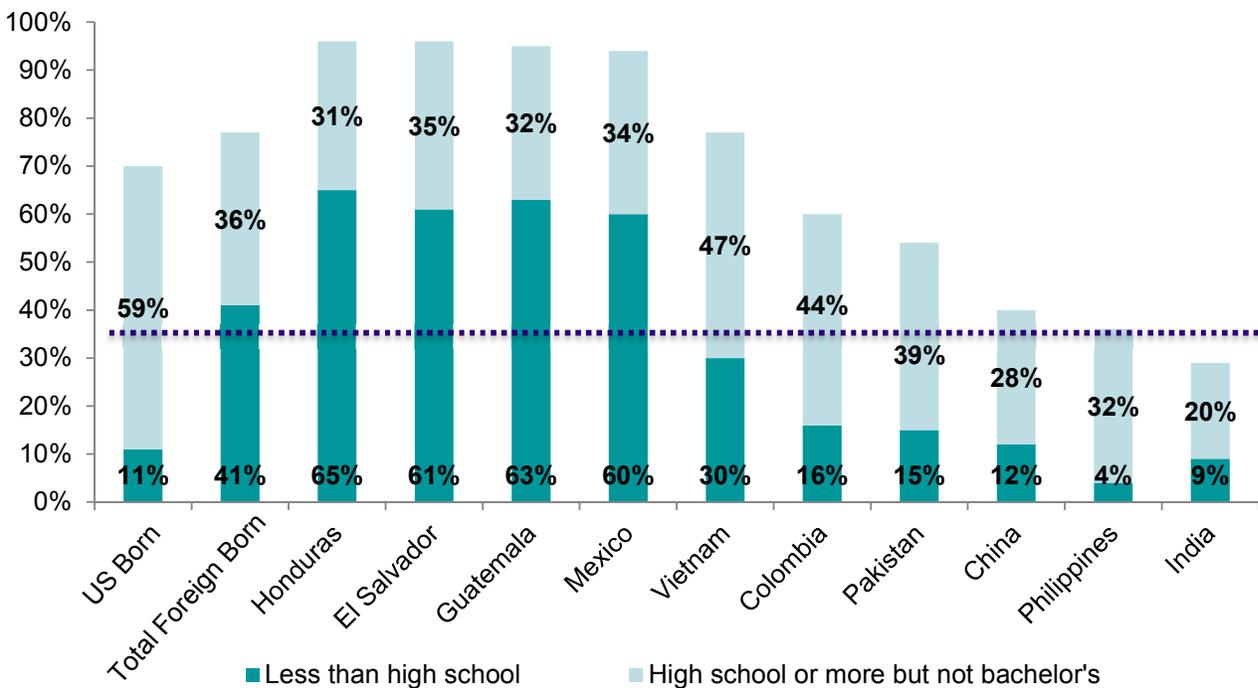
33 MPI, "Unauthorized Immigrant Population Profiles."



Lack of formal education puts Mexican and Central American immigrants at a disadvantage in the Houston labor force, and helps explain their relatively low incomes. For those unauthorized Mexican and Central American youth who otherwise qualify for DACA, lack of a high school education represents an important eligibility barrier. Adult education services may be needed to help some of these immigrants re-enroll in school, improve their labor market skills, and potentially qualify for DACA.

Asian immigrants are more highly educated than Mexican and Central American immigrants in Houston. Immigrants from all major Asian origins except Vietnam are far more likely than the U.S.-born population to have completed at least a bachelor’s degree; among immigrants from India, China, and the Philippines, significant majorities (60 percent or more) have done so. Some of these immigrants received employment-based visas (for example, through the H-1B specialty occupation or L manager programs) on the basis of their high levels of formal education and job skills.

Figure 8. Education Levels of Adults (Ages 25 and Older) in Houston Area, by National Origin, 2008-12



Source: MPI analysis of 2008-12 ACS data.

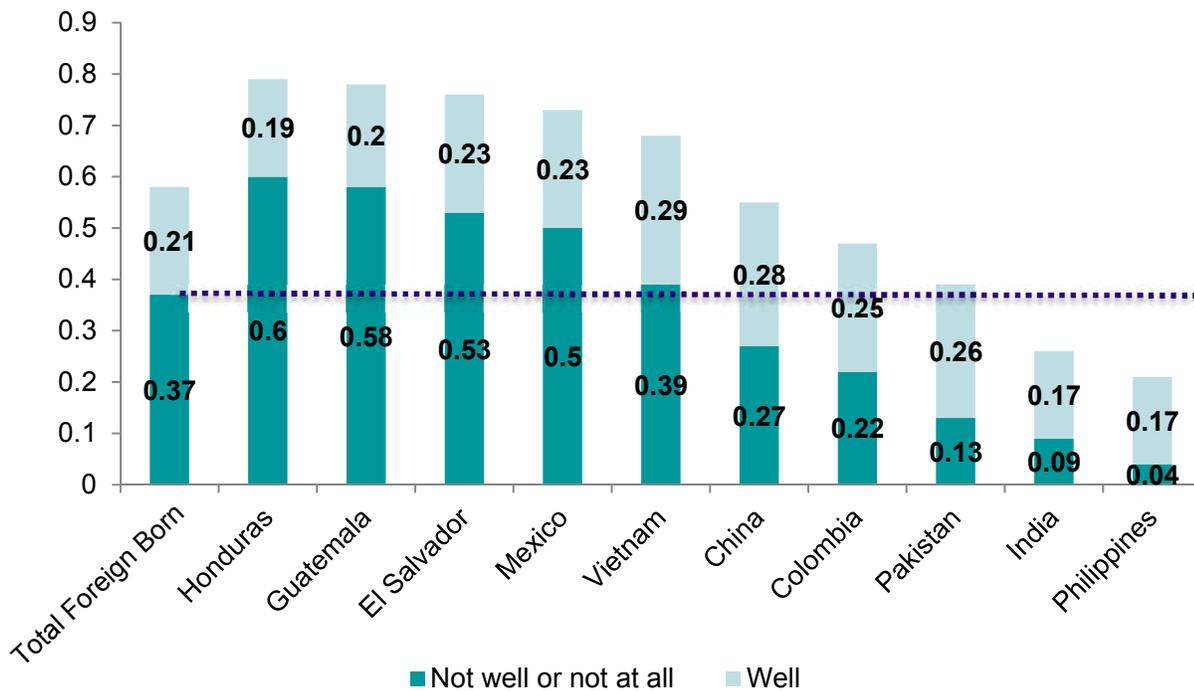
H. English Proficiency

A majority of immigrants from Mexico and Central America living in Houston report they do not speak English well. In 2008-12 at least 50 percent of Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran immigrants did not speak English well or at all (see Figure 9). About 20 percent of immigrants from these four countries spoke English, but not very well. Here, the contrast with Asian countries is less apparent; substantial numbers of immigrants from Vietnam, China, and Pakistan also report not speaking English well.³⁴

³⁴ Among unauthorized immigrants in Houston, 59 percent reported they did not speak English well or at all, while 19 percent spoke English well but not very well. See MPI, “Unauthorized Immigrant Population Profiles.”



Figure 9. Spoken English Proficiency of the Foreign-Born Population (Ages 5 and Older) in Houston Area, by National Origin, 2008-12



Note:

Individuals speaking English well, not well, or not at all are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP) by the U.S. Census Bureau and other federal government agencies. The ACS records two other categories of English proficiency: English spoken as the primary language at home, and English spoken very well.
Source: MPI analysis of ACS data 2008-12.

Limited English proficiency generally impedes the economic and social integration of immigrants. Lower English skills are associated with employment in lower-skilled occupations, and hence lower incomes.³⁵ The naturalization test is conducted in English, and applicants must show a basic level of English proficiency to pass the test. As a result, English language instruction is important to improve the naturalization rates and economic outcomes of Houston's immigrants.

IV. Implications for Immigrant Service Providers in Houston

This profile of Houston's immigrant population was commissioned to inform the public about the immigration-driven demographic changes that have occurred in the Houston area and to provide information for the Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative and other immigration service providers, as they engage in their naturalization and immigration benefit assistance activities. DACA has generated new and substantial demand for application assistance, while DAPA promises to further increase demands on service providers. At the same time, an important goal of the report is to describe Houston's broader immigrant population and place it in the context of the area's growing diversity.

³⁵ Barry R. Chiswick and Paul W. Miller, "Occupational Language Requirements and the Value of English in the U.S. Labor Market," *Journal of Population Economics* 23 (2010): 353-72, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00148-008-0230-7#page-2>.



The authors tabulated the numbers of immigrants potentially in need of community-supported immigration services based on legal status and other characteristics. The following summarizes key results:

- Approximately 350,000 legal permanent residents in Houston are eligible for naturalization but have not applied. Many are Mexican or Central American, as the naturalization rates for most other groups—particularly Asians—are very high. Many Mexican and Central American immigrants have limited English skills. And most have low incomes—below twice the FPL—making naturalization and associated legal fees potentially unaffordable. A combination of outreach, application assistance, free or reduced-price legal assistance, and loans to cover fees would help increase citizenship in this group.
- In Houston approximately 200,000 individuals (about half the area’s unauthorized population) may need outreach, application assistance, and legal support to help them apply or qualify for the DACA or DAPA programs. Approximately 30,000 immediately eligible youth have not yet applied for DACA while 30,000 have received deferred action and may need assistance with renewal. Approximately 140,000 others are potentially eligible for the DAPA program.
- From September 2013 through December 2014, about 4,400 unaccompanied children who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally were taken into federal government custody and reunified with family members living in Harris County. An additional, unreported number were reunified with family members in Harris County before September 2013. Unaccompanied children require substantial legal assistance to help prevent their deportation. Most would be unrepresented without community-supported legal assistance.

The report shows that the city’s immigrant population is not just diverse racially and ethnically but also economically.

The data reviewed in this report offer a broad overview of the immigrant population in Houston, the most diverse major U.S. metropolitan area. The report shows that the city’s immigrant population is not just diverse racially and ethnically but also economically— with foreign-born residents from doctors to construction workers making many contributions to the city’s economy. At the same time, the report also shows that Houston—and in particular its legal services community—face unprecedented levels of demand not just from the large number of legal immigrants who are eligible to naturalize but have not done so, but from potential applicants for the DACA and DAPA programs, and the large number of unaccompanied children settled in the city since the spring and summer of 2014.

For more on MPI’s National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, visit:
www.migrationpolicy.org/integration



Glossary

Foreign born: See *immigrants*.

Immigrants: People born outside the United States (and outside Puerto Rico, Guam, and other U.S. territories) without at least one U.S.-citizen parent. Includes both naturalized citizens and noncitizens.

Legal permanent residents (LPRs): Noncitizens admitted legally for permanent residency, usually through family ties, employment, or as refugees. LPRs are often referred to as green-card holders.

Natives/native born: See *U.S. born*.

Naturalized citizens: LPRs who have become U.S. citizens, usually after passing the citizenship test. The waiting period to take the citizenship test is five years for most permanent residents and three years for those married to U.S. citizens.

Noncitizens: Immigrants who have not become citizens. Noncitizens may be unauthorized immigrants, LPRs, or, in a small number of cases, students and others with temporary visas or protection from removal.

Temporary Protected Status (TPS): A status authorized by Congress and granted to nationals of designated countries that have suffered natural disasters or armed conflict. While individuals with TPS can work legally in the United States, they are not eligible for most public benefits and cannot apply for citizenship.

Unauthorized immigrants: Noncitizens who entered illegally, most of them across the border from Mexico, or who entered legally but overstayed their visas.

U.S. born: People born in the United States, its territories (such as Puerto Rico and Guam), or born abroad to at least one U.S.-citizen parent.



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Previously, he served on the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on the Redesign of U.S. Naturalization Tests and on the Committee on the Health and Adjustment of Immigrant Children. He also served as a member of the Advisory Panel to the Foundation for Child Development's Young Scholars Program. In 2005 he was appointed to the State of Illinois' New Americans Advisory Council, and in 2009 to the State of Maryland's Council for New Americans.

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The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the rising demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that large-scale migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world.

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